



Coast Guard Flag Voice 56

CGSPOUSES.NET WEBSITE

Ms. Mandi Stehn, a Coast Guard spouse for 10 years, is the site owner and administrator for CGSpouses. Net, a web site devoted to fostering support and delivering information to Coast Guard spouses. She created the site in January of this year, having assumed the leadership of the former, related site, Our House (now defunct), two months earlier. Currently the site has about 2,500 members and about 4,500 daily visits. She invites all to view the site at: <http://www.cgspouses.net/>. Please use the site map, available from most pages, to get a quick overview of the site.

A few of the available features:

1. An E-mail Directory allows users to locate both friends from former tours and volunteers who will answer questions about upcoming tours.
2. Consult the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act to answer a "rights" question - likely the only place on the Internet where it is posted in its entirety.
3. A user can locate specific information on possible duty stations with an original feature, Our Town. Compiled from users' submissions, this has proved a very popular feature, especially during transfer season.
3. Regularly scheduled, very well attended real-time chats that have become the cyber equivalent of underway and unit parties for CG spouses who otherwise would never have met.
4. The most popular feature is a real-time bulletin board with several moderated forums grouped by subject matter that allow users to post their thoughts, ideas, and experiences on a variety of topics. Sharing frustrations, joys, and even mundane issues in detail has proved an especially useful method of creating a sense of "community" on the site.

And much, much more . . . more than 25 MB of dynamic information available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, worldwide.

To assist with various aspects of running the site, Mandi is fortunate to have a team of 13 volunteers, a great group of people who run a diverse range from a retired senior officer to a young CG spouse married just a few months. Volunteers' duties range from assisting with the very busy Discussion Forums to advising on the anonymous SPAR panel (answer questions about the Coast Guard and how you fit into the Coast Guard family). The scope of what is offered at the site would be much less comprehensive were it not for these volunteers' time, professionalism, and dedication to service.

As a Coast Guard spouse, Mandi knows first-hand the effect remote units and long duty hours can have on a family (and consequently, the active duty members). Her Internet site, offering camaraderie,

support, and information at the click of a button, is proving a very useful tool both to combat the stressful effects and promote the positive aspects of the challenging lifestyle Coast Guard families lead. Especially within a community such as our Coast Guard, where units tend to be remote and resources scarce compared to the larger DoD services, the Internet emerges as an invaluable tool for helping our families succeed with their choice to live the Coast Guard life.

Mandi has been especially pleased with the informal responses received from various Coast Guard staff - many members have taken it on themselves to supply her with useful links, for example. Additionally, Work-Life staff members have been very receptive to inquiries raised on the site in the course of discussion and can be counted on to respond when the need arises. The MCPO-CG has been a most invaluable source of information for spouses, frequently responding in great detail to questions and concerns site members raise.

Currently, the project is supported mostly by personal funds and a great deal of Mandi's time, with a few small private donations. She is in the process of establishing a structure allowing donations and grant-seeking. No advertising is allowed on the site in any form; the focus is purely support, fellowship, and information.

Although a private site with no official connection, Mandi and those who assist her all are very proud of their individual associations with the Coast Guard; she strives to ensure all site content reflects that pride and the material reflects positively on the Coast Guard in return.

Towards those ends, she has established site policies, <http://www.cgspouses.net/siteinfo/policy/>, especially on operational security, and closely watches site posts that may not represent the Coast Guard well. She actively encourages users to present themselves and their concerns in a manner that reflects well on all of us.

We look forward to continuing a productive, congenial relationship between CGSpouses.Net and the Coast Guard, working to foster support, information, and fellowship among Coast Guard members' families - mutual goals.

Contact Mandi Stehn, Administrator, CGSpouses.Net On-line Community, by E-mail at: mandi@cgspouses.net.

Regards, FL Ames

[Flag Voice Contents](#)

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